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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001642

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [CG](#) [ELECTIONS](#)  
SUBJECT: DRC ELECTIONS: KASAIANS SHOWING GREATER  
WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE

REF: A. KINSHASA 1213

[1](#)B. KINSHASA 1602

[1](#)C. KINSHASA 1562

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: With the DRC's second-round presidential elections taking place October 29, attitudes towards the electoral process in the provinces of Western and Eastern Kasai are changing. Kasaian in the strongholds of the Union for Democracy and Social Progress (UDPS) have been to some degree boycotting the elections, with participation in the July 30 vote among the lowest in the country. Many Kasaians are now eager to participate in the October 29 balloting, however, and nearly all observers of Kasaian politics expect a higher turnout rate for the second round. End summary.

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HISTORICALLY LOW TURNOUT  
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[1](#)2. (U) Politics in Western and Eastern Kasai provinces has largely been dominated by the UDPS, which has officially boycotted the electoral process. Kasaian participation in the December 2005 constitutional referendum and July 30 elections was well below the national averages. Seventy percent of voters nationwide turned out for the July 30 contest, but just 39 percent in Eastern Kasai and 45 percent in Western Kasai. In addition, the cities of Mweka (Western Kasai) and Mbuji-Mayi (Eastern Kasai) were two of the only locations in the country where violence broke out during the July 30 vote (ref A).

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UDPS DIVISIONS PRODUCING NEW OUTLOOK  
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[1](#)3. (C) Divisions within the UDPS have now contributed to a more favorable Kasaian outlook toward elections. The party's leadership has publicly split over whether it should endorse a candidate in the October 29 vote (ref B). The debate provided Kasaian supporters with a new perspective on the electoral process. MONUC-Kananga Head of Office Jean-Victor Nkolo said October 1 UDPS officials in the province have realized that they must vote in order to save their party. Nkolo told us that many traditional UDPS supporters are disillusioned with the party's leadership and will not boycott elections again. In fact, the party's provincial president in Eastern Kasai urged members to vote in the second round (ref C), the first time any UDPS official had publicly encouraged members to participate in the electoral process.

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CHURCH'S POSITION EVOLVING AS WELL  
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¶4. (C) Another important element in the changing attitude of Kasaians is the position of the Catholic Church, which wields a great deal of influence throughout the country. The Vicar-General of Mbuji-Mayi, Monsignor Albert Mbombo, said October 4 he believed participation will be much higher this time. He said people realize they made "a huge mistake" in not voting, and that nothing can change in their lives if they do not elect people who can represent their interests.

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STILL, SOME RESERVATIONS  
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¶5. (C) Members of civil society groups in both provinces took a more measured view of the evolution in Kasaiian politics. Kananga's civil society president Alex Mukanya said he was still concerned about potential acts of politically-related violence. He said many candidates in Western Kasai were reluctant to campaign out of fear of harassment by UDPS supporters. Mukanya was optimistic that the province would see a higher voter turnout rate this time. Civil society officials in Mbuji-Mayi expected more voters to head to the polls October 29, despite a turnout of only 16 percent in the July 30 election. Mbuji-Mayi's civil society president Kabongo Mwana said many Kasaians would vote because they were "embarrassed" by the results of the first-round elections. He said one deputy from Mbuji-Mayi was elected with just 300 votes, and many have asked how such a person could legitimately represent Kasaiian interests in the National

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Assembly.

¶6. (C) Isolated acts of campaign-related violence have continued. MONUC vehicles in Mbuji-Mayi are sometimes stoned while driving through UDPS-controlled sections of the city. CEI officials in Kananga and Mbuji-Mayi said their workers are often harassed or prevented from distributing election materials in certain areas. Campaign materials of pro-Kabila candidates are sometimes destroyed or defaced. According to Hubert Tshiswaka, the CEI's provincial coordinator for Eastern Kasai, the frequency of such acts has markedly diminished over the past several weeks, however.

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VOTES UP FOR GRABS COULD DETERMINE WINNER  
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¶7. (C) A higher turnout in the Kasais for the second round would have an impact on the final presidential vote. Approximately 2.3 million registered voters in the Kasais did not participate in the July 30 elections; this represents nearly one-third of voter abstentions nationwide. Neither President Kabila nor Vice President Bemba won a majority in either province during the July 30 vote, making the Kasais a key battleground. As Kabila appears assured a majority in the east, and Bemba in the west, the Kasaiian vote could be pivotal. (Note: An analysis of Kabila's and Bemba's electoral chances in the Kasais will be reported septel. End note.)

¶8. (C) Higher participation could also be driven by the provincial assembly elections being held the same day. Several observers in the Kasais told us voters are more interested in electing local leaders who will be better able to respond to their needs. Provincial assembly campaigning was visible in Kananga and Mbuji-Mayi just days after the official campaign period began earlier in the month, a marked difference from the virtual absence of such activity in July. Civil society president Mwana said the familiarity voters have with provincial candidates, who are often local shopkeepers and community officials, will encourage more

people to head to the polls.

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COMMENT  
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¶9. (C) A reasonable expectation may be a participation rate of close to 50 percent in both provinces. Voter participation has steadily increased since the December 2005 referendum even though many voted against the constitution, and a majority voted for candidates who did not move to the second round. End comment.  
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